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Office of Planning & Zoning

Janet M. Hurley
Planning & Zoning Director
Zoning Administrator
E 9-1-1 Coordinator
j.hurley@manchester-vt.gov

Leslie Perra
Assistant Zoning Administrator
l.perra@manchester-vt.gov

REPORT OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION ON THE PROPOSED MANCHESTER DOWNTOWN STRATEGIC PLAN FOR SEPTEMBER 17, 2018, PUBLIC HEARING

Pursuant to 24 V.S.A. Chapter 117, §4384, the Manchester Planning Commission will hold a public hearing on Monday, September 17, 2018, beginning at 7:00 PM in the Kilburn Meeting Room at the Manchester Town Offices at 40 Jeff Williams Way (formerly 6039 Main Street), Manchester Center, Vermont. The purpose of the hearing is to receive public comment on the proposed ***Manchester Downtown Strategic Plan***. Pursuant to §4384, this report is prepared to address the extent to which the proposed plan is consistent with state planning goals as established in 24 V.S.A. Chapter 117, §4302. These include 4 general goals and 14 specific goals, which are individually addressed below.

Consistency with General State Planning Goals:

To establish a coordinated, comprehensive planning process and policy framework to guide decisions by municipalities, regional planning commissions, and State agencies.

Manchester has a well established and statutorily compliant planning process that includes regular revision and adoption of the town plan and land use and development ordinance, as well as the Manchester Capital Improvement Program. The town regularly engages in specialized planning projects and studies, such as the recently completed Northshire Economic Development Strategy (NEDS) and newly reformulated and adopted zoning ordinance funded in part by the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development through the Municipal Planning Grant program. The town regularly seeks and attains funding from the Agency of Commerce and Community Development and other state agencies to pursue planning and infrastructure improvement projects. The town is engaged in regional planning efforts by the Bennington County Regional Commission (BCRC) and receives assistance from the BCRC for municipal planning efforts. The Planning Commission, Conservation Commission, Design Advisory Committee, and Development Review Board all meet regularly to address various aspects of planning and development in Manchester with the involvement of dedicated staff and an engaged citizenry. This downtown plan reflects this established planning process and is the result of a September 2017 planning charrette funded through the state Municipal Planning Grant program.

To encourage citizen participation at all levels of the planning process, and to assure that decisions shall be made at the most local level possible commensurate with their impact.

This downtown strategic plan builds upon recent completed planning efforts such as NEDS and the comprehensive reformulation of the zoning ordinance. It is the result of an intensive week of public planning workshops conducted in September 2017 during a regional professional planning conference that was held in Manchester. The charrette engaged dozens of citizens, business owners, and professional planners to address important challenges and opportunities in Downtown Manchester.

To consider the use of resources and the consequences of growth and development for the region and the State, as well as the community in which it takes place.

The downtown strategic plan reinforces needs for concentrated housing and commercial services in the core, while protecting the rural character and working lands nature of the outlying areas of Manchester.

To encourage and assist municipalities to work creatively together to develop and implement plans.

As it has in the past, Manchester will continue to seek the cooperation of neighbors and the regional planning commission and state agencies in realizing its planning goals. The strategic plan reflects an understanding that land use and economic development issues very often transcend municipal boundaries requiring cooperation with other communities and with local, regional, and state agencies. The plan also recognizes that cooperation with other entities will be essential to address downtown challenges. The Taconic & Green School District, Green Mountain Power, and organizations like Manchester Business Association, Bike Manchester, Manchester Riverwalk, and Manchester Historical Society among others are referenced as important partners in achieving stated goals.

Consistency with Specific State Planning Goals:

To plan development so as to maintain the historic settlement pattern of compact village and urban centers separated by rural countryside.

Manchester has a long established goal to encourage denser development in the downtown while protecting the rural nature of outlying areas. This plan update reiterates that central goal, and focusses on the downtown in particular.

To provide a strong and diverse economy that provides satisfying and rewarding job opportunities and that maintains high environmental standards, and to expand economic opportunities in areas with high unemployment or low per capita incomes.

This plan incorporates relevant findings and goals of the Northshire Economic Development Strategy (NEDS) completed in 2016. The object of the strategic plan is to support a vibrant economic environment that encourages people to both live and work in Manchester's downtown. Strategies include (1) enabling and encouraging residential use in the downtown, (2) fostering diverse non-residential uses in the downtown; (3) enhancing passageways

between the downtown and neighboring residential settlements and surrounding countryside, (4) establish the downtown as a vibrant, pedestrian oriented environment, (5) improving wayfinding and appearance of anchor and gateways in the downtown, and (6) foster partnerships to form a downtown organization to implement reinvestment activities.

To broaden access to educational and vocational training opportunities sufficient to ensure the full realization of the abilities of all Vermonters.

This plan is focused on enhancing the vitality and livability of the downtown. Insofar as it includes address of long-standing circulation issues at the Manchester Elementary & Middle School (MEMS), it may be said to touch upon educational opportunities in the town.

To provide for safe, convenient, economic and energy efficient transportation systems that respect the integrity of the natural environment, including public transit options and paths for pedestrians and bicyclers.

Manchester recently completed major transportation system enhancements with the construction of two new roundabouts, transforming what had long been called “Malfunction Junction” into what is now referred to as “Function Junction” at the intersection of Depot Street and Main Street and at the companion intersection of Main Street with Bonnet Street. In addition, bike and pedestrian enhancements to Depot Street are scheduled to occur in 2019 that will transform an automobile focused corridor into one that is pedestrian and bicycle friendly. These projects have been long prioritized in town planning documents. This strategic plan recognizes these major recent investments and reiterates the continued importance of transforming the town’s transportation system to accommodate all users and to enhance multiuse pathways throughout the downtown. In addition, standards for improving the safety and efficiency of parking and circulation at MEMS are specifically addressed.

To identify, protect, and preserve important natural and historic features of the Vermont landscape.

The strategic plan reiterates the community’s priority to protect its natural resources, especially its scenic ridgelines and the Batten Kill, as a basis to the town’s economy and quality of life. The plan recognizes the importance of protecting Manchester’s four designated historic districts and establishing wayfinding that elucidates and provides connections to the town’s historic settlement patterns.

To maintain and improve the quality of air, water, wildlife, forests, and other land resources.

The Manchester community values its natural beauty and quality of life as essential. Consequently, all actions by the town are aimed at seeking to maximize and enhance these assets. This plan reflects the goal of concentrating development in the core of town, which is in line with protecting our natural resources and scenic beauty.

To make efficient use of energy, provide for the development of renewable energy resources, and reduce emissions of greenhouse gases.

Focused on increasing residential and commercial uses within the downtown while protecting and connecting to the natural resources and of the surrounding countryside, the downtown strategic plan reflects this statewide planning goal.

To maintain and enhance recreational opportunities for Vermont residents and visitors.

The strategic plan recognizes the importance of recreation opportunities in Manchester for both residents and visitors alike. Enhancing access to the Batten Kill along the Manchester Riverwalk is an integral piece of this downtown strategic plan.

To encourage and strengthen agricultural and forest industries.

To the extent that this plan leads to branding Manchester as a regional food hub with a farm to table programing, supports a strong farmers market, and encourages connections with outdoor recreation opportunities in the surrounding forested mountains, it will strengthen regional agricultural forest based enterprises.

To provide for the wise and efficient use of Vermont's natural resources and to facilitate the appropriate extraction of earth resources and the proper restoration and preservation of the aesthetic qualities of the area.

Preservation of the aesthetic qualities of Manchester are an essential element of this strategic plan.

To ensure the availability of safe and affordable housing for all Vermonters.

This downtown strategic plan reflects a town imperative to address a shortage of workforce level housing, specifically for the downtown, and commits the town to encouraging mixed use development including residential in the downtown. The plan also commits the town to pursuing a Neighborhood Area Development designation from the state, which would provide incentives to developers of pedestrian oriented neighborhood housing around the designated Village Center, which falls fully within the downtown planning area.

To plan for, finance and provide an efficient system of public facilities and services to meet future needs.

This plan will serve as a guide in formulating the next update of the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) last updated in 2014, particularly as relates to the MEMS circulation and parking issues.

To ensure the availability of safe and affordable child care and to integrate child care issues into the planning process, including child care financing, infrastructure, business assistance for child care providers, and child care work force development.

This issue is not directly addressed in this plan, but the town will continue to encourage child care facilities as an integral element of attracting a resident workforce in the downtown.

To encourage flood resilient communities.

Although this issue was not directly addressed by this plan, all development activities in the downtown will occur in compliance with the flood hazard regulations established in the *Manchester Land Use & Development Ordinance*.

A copy of the proposed Manchester Downtown Strategic Plan is available for review in the office of the Manchester Town Clerk, Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., at 40 Jeff Williams Way (formerly 6039 Main Street), Manchester Center, Vermont, and on the town website (www.manchester-vt.gov). For further information or questions, please contact Janet Hurley, Planning & Zoning Director, at j.hurley@manchester-vt.gov or 802-362-1313 option 3.